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10 February 1966

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MEMORANDUM FOR: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT: Item Register

The unique identification of items is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for three different types of activity: (a) current operations, especially of document and information handling systems, (b) system design, and (c) the management of resources. Such identification goes on throughout the community now, but problems exist in the efficiency of the processes and in the capability of management to use the identification in connection with system design and the management of resources.

a. Current operations: In those units whose job it is to service customers by identifying documents needed and then obtaining them, (for example, units in the Document Division and the CIA Library), the proliferation of intelligence information-bearing series of documents with similar titles or other identifying features imposes a burden by requiring those units to create or maintain cross-reference files, produce or utilize a variety of catalogs, and provide for long and expensive on-the-job training before their professionals can perform their duties adequately. Such units must first find out from their customers just what they want, and then must phrase the request in terms of the local system from which the document must be borrowed. The existence of "popular" titles which are similar for different series makes this a time-consuming problem. For example, many different intelligence organizations and organizational elements produce series of items called: Information Reports, Technical Reports, Daily Reports, Intelligence Reviews, Intelligence Digests, etc. Standing alone, such titles are ambiguous. In practice some of these are amplified by the addition of producer's name, e.g., Defense Intelligence Digest; and/or frequency of issuance such as Weekly Intelligence Digest (PACOM); or category as is the case with the Scientific Intelligence Digest (OSI/CIA); or general purpose such as Current Intelligence Digest (OCI/CIA), Counterintelligence Digest (USAFE and PACAF), and Weekly Counterintelligence Summary (USAFE & PACAF).

In some instances, even these amplifications do not suffice in providing unique identifications. In the case of Information Reports, a series designation in addition to

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producing agency is found to be desirable. For example, designation of Information Reports produced by CIA as OOA's, OOB's, CS's, etc. The same is true for NSA's Elint Reports which are also given unique series identification.

A final example is the issuance from time to time of sanitized versions of a given document wherein the releasability statement may be the most apparent, if not the only, indication of different content in two otherwise identically titled and identified series. Similar problems arise in identifying documents issued at different security levels which, if treated as a single series, give rise to confusion and possible inadvertent disclosure.

In each of these cases unique identification can be and is made - but only by obtaining more descriptive elements than the mere title. If the customer does not know these elements, a dead-end may result. If he does but must be queried again, extra work is the result. These units throughout the community are doing their job under these circumstances, but only by creating files and fostering expertise which in effect bring into being dozens of miniature "item registers" in many organizations. The need therefore exists for some centralized assistance (as in the proposed Item Register System) which can conserve manpower, expertise and time by eliminating at least some of the need for many auxiliary files and for such a long training period. Almost every unit throughout the community dealing with this problem is obliged to create "snag" files or "authority" files to help them identify what the customer wants and then to express this identification in the terms needed by another unit which might have the item. A large number of "catalogs" or "item lists" have been created by producing organizations, both for management purposes and to aid in this identification process. A list of some of these catalogs can be found in Appendix 3 of the Task Team II report. The combined coverage of these "catalogs" is not complete, however, and they use different formats, different elements of information, and different methods of representation, thus increasing the difficulty of using them for the identification problem. The publication, in 1957 and 1959, of CODIB's Union List of Intelligence Serial Publications (Union List) represented a partial answer to this problem. The usefulness of this publication is still attested by the dog-eared copies used every day in many processing units; the limitations are indicated by the vast number of additions and notes pencilled into these copies. The Union List was not fully comprehensive, and it was not dynamic. An Item Register system would be both. Furthermore, the Item Register would provide an unclassified, unique identifying number for each

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intelligence item by which it could be differentiated from all other intelligence items regardless of title or other similarity. This unique number would provide the "handle" by which these items could be referenced in unclassified messages or telephone conversations. In that regard it would be similar in usage to the Bombing Encyclopedia Number (BENO) assigned to installations as recommended in the Task Team IV report.

b. System design: Identification is necessary for system design and information exchange as well as for document borrowing and dissemination. Here the need is to describe efficiently, simply, and accurately the inclusion and exclusion of information content in a given file or information system, operational or under design. An example of this need is the fact that CIA's CHIVE designers have so far found it necessary to expend over 90 man-days in an effort to itemize series for Communist China so that selection criteria, inclusion and exclusion decisions and other design decisions can be made. This list, for one country only, is only one-shot, however, and will have to be updated continually either during development or operation of the new system. An Item Register System can be of considerable assistance to Project CHIVE for areas of the world to be implemented after China.

c. Management of resources: Not until we can accurately and definitively describe the scope and content of our information systems can we hope to have more useful interchange between systems. Neither can we usefully identify and eliminate duplication of information processing until we have a means of item identification on a common or comparable basis. Since many document series contain information on a variety of subjects and areas, and can be used by organizations doing a variety of functional tasks in the community, accurate and definitive inventories of such document series plus the ability to divide the total into meaningful classes are needed when managers consider how to "assign responsibility" for information processing.

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